# Effective Classroom & Behaviour Management

# Introduction

The subject of effective classroom and behaviour management is an extremely complex and wide-ranging one that affects most teachers, especially at the start of their career. ‘Pupil behaviour is indeed an issue for most students in their first teaching experience’ (McNally et al, 2005, p.179). The role of a teacher is not limited to the delivery of her[[1]](#footnote-0) subject. The teacher is often the main provider of guidance in relation to behaviour and social development (Porter, 2004). Setting up a framework for classroom and behaviour management can help teachers to address this vital aspect of teaching.

‘Classroom and behaviour management’ can be seen as how the physical environment of the classroom is laid out, how the children are arranged in groups, what resources are available in the room, as well as the management of the people within the classroom through rules, discipline and behaviour routines[[2]](#footnote-1). ‘Management’ is pupil control to achieve compliance (Porter, 2004) or else pupil guidance to facilitate learning. ‘Effective’ can be getting the class to be quiet, ensuring learning is taking place or making sure that tasks are completed (Rogers, 2006).

This essay is intended to define effective classroom and behaviour management in relation to current theory and practice. It will provide a critical analysis of approaches currently used in schools.

It will go on to identify the approach I feel is the most effective and analyse this further in relation to a specific pupil group, namely pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Finally, it will develop mypriorities for block teaching experience one for effective behaviour management in the classroom.

**Approaches to Classroom and Behaviour Management**

There have been many theories, both psychological and pedagogical, relating to behaviour management, from which many approaches have been developed. Although the various approaches have (often subtle) differences, many are based upon a structured classroom or school-wide plan and most offer some kind of reward (physical rewards, reinforcers or positive feedback) and sanctions (prescribed, chosen or consequential).

**Positive Behaviour Management**

The first approach I would like to consider is the Positive Behaviour Management approach put forward by Bill Rogers (2007, 2006). It was developed through his experience as a teacher and teacher-mentor and aims to “establish more co-operative classrooms where rights and responsibilities work together to the benefit of all” (Rogers, 2006: 4).

The approach centres on a behaviour agreement that establishes common rights, protected by rules and responsibilities that pupils have to uphold the rights for themselves and for others. The agreement is taught to (and agreed with) pupils at the start of the year in the establishment phase and reinforced through its consistent application.

Although the teacher has an authoritative role, it is not an authoritarian one. The use of minimally-invasive, directional language and positive feedback help to express this. Directional phrases such as “Settling down now” (rather than imperatives or questions) and partial agreement (“Mrs Smith might let you do that…”), along with other cues such as tactical pauses, can all help to achieve, maintain or restore order. Relaxed vigilance (when teachers ignore behaviour that does not interfere with learning) ensures the flow of lessons. Positive, descriptive feedback for appropriate behaviour also helps to internalise appropriate behaviour.

Behavioural consequences are given for unacceptable behaviour. They are reinforced through behaviour recovery (addressing reasons for behaviour, creating an improvement plan with teacher support and rebuilding relationships).

The teacher is encouraged to address behaviours and actions in their own rights and not let emotion cloud judgement. Primary behaviour (the behaviour that broke the rule) is separated from secondary behaviours (often unconscious reactive behaviour such as muttering, sulking, etc.) that can cause teachers the most frustration but should be ignored. Although a teacher cannot control the behaviour of others, they can control their reaction to it (Rogers, 2006).

Rogers’ approach is not derived from theory but from practice. However, certain aspects of the approach relate to Cognitive Behaviourism (Gagné in Case and Bereiter, 1984). Through the positive feedback and behaviour recovery strategies that Rogers proposes, pupils are provided with the step-by-step support needed to get from their current behaviour to the required behaviour.

Elements of the approach also have roots in Vygotsky’s Social Constructivist Theory (1978, 1985 cited in Jarvis, 2005) that people learn through social interaction. In practise, the teacher passes on information about correct behaviour and effective social interaction by teaching and implementing the behaviour agreement. Through the establishment phase, Rogers addresses the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978, 1987 cited in Jarvis, 2005) in which the gap between what he child understands alone and what he can understand through interaction with the teacher can be crossed, enabling the child to build his own links between behaviour and its outcomes.

The approach relates closely to other practical approaches. Glasser’s Control Theory (1986, cited in Porter, 2000) states that in learning more about the pupils in a class, the teacher will be able to address their individual needs – it is this that drives pupil behaviour. Pupils will further be motivated to learn if they feel the curriculum is relevant (Powell and Tod, 2004). Through confident, enthusiastic teaching, positive feedback and an interest in pupils, Rogers’ approach enables this to happen.

Rogers does not talk about providing rewards to students in any great detail, concentrating instead on providing specific, descriptive positive feedback. This is advocated by Hook and Vass (2005 cited in Parry, 2007), ‘emotional feedback is the most effective form of reward.’ In my opinion, when leaving school, pupils will not continue to be rewarded with positive feedback quite so regularly so this aspect of the approach does not prepare pupils for life after school.

With regard to consequences, Rogers does not advocate punishment but suggests that behavioural consequences must be followed up, enabling the child to learn and progress. Kohn (1999) agrees, stating that ‘a child’s misbehaviour is best construed as a ‘teachable moment,’ a problem to be solved together rather than an infraction that requires a punitive response.’

Rogers’ positive approach also helps teachers to respond calmly to disruptive situations. ‘Behaviour programmes start with the adults looking at their own behaviour and how they can control it to help a child develop strong positive responses to social situations ’ (Burnard, 1998: 4). However, it is difficult to take a step back from situations and react calmly, especially as an inexperienced teacher and does not guide teachers through a communicative dead-end. Rogers’ approach ‘appears to be concerned more with coping with the way things are than bringing about any change in the philosophical approach to teaching and learning’ (Golby and Viant, 2007: 242). ‘Concepts such as ‘relaxed vigilance’ and ‘tactical ignoring (Rogers, 1995)… are eminently sensible but may mean much more to experienced teachers than beginners with little experience of their own to relate to’ (McNally et al, 2005: 181). It does, however, provide a useful starting point.

Rogers’ approach integrates the behaviour of pupils into a structured system that helps them to build their own understanding of the behaviour agreement. It provides practical techniques that are also reflected by other practitioners. It is not a catch-all approach but may be used as a basis on which to build concrete strategies for dealing with problem students.

**School X Approach – Rewards and Positive Discipline**

The second approach I will evaluate is the approach used in School X entitled ‘Rewards and Positive Discipline’ (appendix A). It is based on the school’s ‘Enterprise Ethos’ (appendix B, displayed on every classroom wall and used in dialogue with students) and is intended to be a behaviour improvement programme (Hayden, 2008).

The elements of the enterprise ethos stem from the business and enterprise specialism of School X but apply to most areas of school life and relate to the outcomes described in the government Every Child Matters: Change for Children strategy (2005).

The approach is largely a positive one that rewards achievement (see appendix A). Pupils are encouraged to collect individual credits and points and also given class and school-wide awards.

Sanctions follow a logical progression of stages starting with a verbal warning and the loss of a ‘behaviour star’ (see appendix C for details of the sanctions policy), although this is not followed for certain misdemeanours (also outlined in appendix C) and for any behaviour that may cause harm to students or staff. In such instances a ‘red card system’ is in place.

All students have independent access to school rules and the enterprise ethos through their planners (appendix D gives an overview of the content therein). Students are encouraged to contribute to classroom rules in their ‘Life Skills’[[3]](#footnote-2) lessons at the start of the year. The ‘Student Voice’ policy (appendix E) gives the students an opportunity to take a wider role in decisions about their learning.

School X’s approach is an authoritarian one is closely linked with behaviourism. Skinner (1954, cited in Case and Breiter, 1984) suggested that behaviour could be altered in the direction of required behaviour through the use of rewards and consequences (behaviour reinforcers). If pupils exhibit certain behaviours, teachers can ‘catch them being good’ (Holloway, 2008) and pupils receive an immediate reward in the form of a credit with no reasoning given for the reward.

In relation to current educational approaches, School X’s approach reflects Canter & Canter’s Assertive Discipline (2001). The enterprise ethos contains the components of the classroom discipline plan in the form of rules, supportive feedback and corrective actions (sanctions). As in School X, Assertive Discipline also advocates the use of rewards although it suggests that rewards be used sparingly and appropriately (2001).

According to Canter & Canter, ‘Corrective actions must be seen as natural outcomes of inappropriate behaviour’ (2001: 64) and should be applied consistently although they do not need to be severe to be effective. This is certainly the case at School X. Great pains are taken to only remove behaviour stars as a last resort, which reduces the severity of sanctions applied.

The approach in School X reflects Canter & Canter’s assertion that teachers have the right (and responsibility) to impose order and that teachers should make it clear to pupils what is expected of them.

The use of behaviour improvement programmes such as this one is popular in schools. Indeed, the government set up a behaviour improvement programme in 2002, which now forms part of the government’s National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy (Hayden, 2008). As with all approaches, it has its advantages and disadvantages.

The use of praise in this approach (reinforced by credits) is frequent. Studies have revealed that the use of appropriate praise can increase on-task behaviour in pupils (Ferguson and Houghton, 1992). However, findings from other studies were less positive when schools did not already have serious behavioural problems (Porter, 2000).

The credit system used in the school does help to give attention to good behaviour but there is much opposition to systems of reward. When using rewards ‘our attention is properly focused… not on ‘that (the thing desired) but on the requirement that ‘one must do this in order to get that’ (Kohn, 1999: 4). Thus, a reward detracts from the nature of learning. Studies show that rewards do not lead to an increased understanding but merely increased compliance. An emphasis on the value of learning itself could help to redress the problem, as could giving rewards that directly relate to the action (for example books as a reward for book-reading) (Kohn, 1999).

With regard to consequences, Rogers (2006) suggests the detentions should be linked to the behaviour that caused the detention to be given (for example, using the time to complete a questionnaire about the behaviour and the ensuing recovery plan). In School X, this is not the case. In addition, high-level detentions are given for seemingly minor infractions such as breaches in the uniform code that do not detract others from learning. These sanctions do nothing to get to the root of the behavioural problem or make pupils take responsibility for their actions. In fact, punishment like this can actually increase undesirable behaviour, as evidenced by Jones & Jones (1998 cited in Porter, 2000) who found that increased punitive control raised misbehaviour from 9% to 31%.

The approach in School X relies heavily on teacher-control. There is some evidence that Assertive Discipline only works when the class teacher is there and that supply teachers face problems (Belvel and Jordan, 2003).

In order to learn, children need to establish positive relationships with themselves (engagement), others (participation) and the curriculum (access) (B4L, 2007). School X’s mission statement echoes this but in reality, much focus is placed on passing exams. Pupils are ‘levelled’ at an early age and are therefore not encouraged to extend themselves beyond the ‘reward’ (predicted level). The school environment does not meet the physical, social and emotional needs of the students (Glasser, 1986 in Porter, 2000).

Of the two approaches, Bill Rogers’ Positive Behaviour Management is the most appealing. Although, on the surface, Assertive Discipline provides the teacher with tools to control the class, Positive Behaviour Management provides the pupil with the tools to be able to control himself. I have seen from observation in school that sanctions and rewards do not always work. Pupils become disgruntled if they feel they have been applied unfairly and the loss of behaviour stars is actually given kudos by some pupils.

I feel that, implemented consistently, Bill Rogers’ approach helps pupils to deal with their own behaviour, supporting them through behaviour recovery and demonstrating the connection between behaviour, learning and the learning of others. Although some mention of pupil rights is made in School X, its approach does not achieve this. Rewards are used too easily to divert attention away from the real issue.

It is, however, difficult to compare a theoretical approach with one used in schools. It is easy to draw more criticism of an approach that is seen on a regular basis with live examples and impracticalities. No approach is flawless and I am sure that in my own teaching, I will discover limitations with the Positive Behaviour Management approach but for the moment it provides me with a more solid basis on which to build to prepare pupils not only for life in school but life after school.

**Positive Behaviour Management in Relation to Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)**

I would now like to look at Rogers’ Positive Behaviour Management approach in relation to students with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD).To provide a definition of this pupil group, the behaviours of pupils with EBD ‘present a barrier to learning and persist despite the implementation of an effective school behaviour policy and personal/social curriculum.  They may be withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration, have immature social skills or present challenging behaviours.’ (Teachernet, 2008).

The DFES inclusive schooling policy supports the Positive Behaviour Management approach (Parry, 2007). If pupils are engaged, they are less likely to misbehave to teachers must give pupils the tools to facilitate engagement. ‘Pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties are the most difficult group for schools to manage’ (Ofsted, 2005: 3). Ofsted reports that attendance is an issue, which leads to a break in learning, leading to further behavioural problems. The office proposes that pupils appreciate clear and consistent rules and expectations from teachers. Primary to secondary level transition can also cause problems but Rogers’ establishment phase could help to address this.

In line with their recommendations, Rogers also suggests practical advice for dealing with some behavioural difficulties (such as attention deficit disorder). He proposes making routines clear, giving small, incremental targets, providing additional help, regularly checking for understanding of the task. For attention-seeking behaviours, he proposes talking to the child after class to reveal the reason for the behaviour – for the teacher to suggest what she thinks the reason for the behaviour might be, to seek confirmation from the pupil, and to then work on an IBP.

The counselling side of the approach may present a problem for pupils with severe EBD. It does require pupils to have a certain level of self-esteem in order to be able to explore their behaviour and get to the bottom of their problems (Porter, 2000). However, Rogers does provide a structure that involves setting goals for behaviour and working through this in individual behaviour plans using goal disclosure (getting to the root of the behaviour), modelling, rehearsal and descriptive feedback.

Rogers reinforces focusing strongly on primary behaviour. The child may well be seeking attention and by focusing on the actual infraction, attention is not given unreservedly.

Rogers states it is important not to excuse behaviour using the EBD label as this can often make pupils conform to the expectation of the behaviour (2006). In School X (as I would assume in other schools), great care is taken to inform teachers of the problems a pupil faces while not drawing attention to it in class. Further, the approach advocates helping a child to see past his behaviour to learn who is actually in control – the difficulty or him. Expectations of success correlate with persistent effort. Especially in males, if pupils believe they are likely to succeed, disruptive behaviour is likely to decrease (Powell and Tod, 2004).

A school-wide approach is also important in implementing individual behaviour plans (IBP). It is critical that all teachers are working to the same plan so that the pupil’s expectations are clear and consistent.

Rogers helpfully suggests that although home environment, history and background can influence behaviour, teachers have no control over these factors and should therefore not use them to excuse behaviour. Schools may need to have a time-out plan for such pupils for when emotion overwhelms them. In addition, letting the pupil calm down before trying to talk to him is helpful. If the pupil refuses to stay back after class, it may actually be more helpful to let him go and talk to him about the problem tomorrow.

It takes a great deal of skill to incite any pupil to be interested in a subject that he sees holds no inherent value for him. The change to the new Key Stage 4 curriculum and individualised learning programmes may go some way to helping address EBD in pupils, taking them away from the traditional curriculum towards something more meaningful. From what I have seen in School X, this would be of benefit, as it would enable pupils to take more responsibility for their learning and give them more choice.

School X’s inclusion policy (see appendix F) provides information on strategies used in relation to EBD, which reflect Bill Rogers’ approach with items such as pastoral support plans, individualised learning plans and counselling.

**Development of Practice in Classroom and Behaviour Management**

The classroom environment must have strategies in place that help pupils to learn through engagement, social interaction and a relevant curriculum. This section of the essay will describe how I intend to develop my skills in classroom and behaviour management to address these factors, taking into account the observations and limitations of practical application in School X and the theoretical approach described in Positive Behaviour Management by Bill Rogers.

School X’s behaviour policy, although heavily focused on rewards and sanctions, at least in theory aims to provide pupils with the tools to be responsible for their own behaviour and learning and to be able to contribute positively to society.

I feel that I have the confidence and enthusiasm to be an effective teacher but will need to implement School X’s policy in conjunction with strategies suggested by Rogers to become a reflective practitioner. I have learned that there is not a catch-all solution that will fit every class, child or situation and I will need to develop my own strategies to address this. For block teaching experience 1, I intend to make the development of these skills a priority as I believe this is key to effective teaching. My priorities are described in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, I will try to build positive relationships with the pupils (by learning names, asking about hobbies, taking an interest in extra-curricular activities and parents’ evenings), find out more about them and relate my teaching to them on a personal level. I will provide constructive, specific feedback about work and behaviour, and make suggestions for improvement.

I will internalise the classroom discipline rules and procedures used in school and will reference the main aims of the enterprise ethos when possible in order to be able to take a step back emotionally and be consistent in my feedback. I will remind pupils of their rights and reponsiblities in relation to their organisation, behaviour and learning. I will try to give credits when appropriate (as this is part of the school policy so difficult to avoid and it will ensure consistency with other teaching staff), but I will ensure they are accompanied by positive feedback so that pupils know why they are being given. I will develop my own classroom routines so that I can start lessons positively and confidently, and communicate my expectations to pupils.

I will ensure that the material I am teaching is presented in a way that is accessible to all pupils by providing support materials for learners as required and presenting materials in a variety of formats to cover different learning styles, referencing the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register and any IBPs to ensure pupil needs are met.

I will record and evaluate (in relation to the Positive Behaviour Management approach) pertinent events in the classroom, both in observations and in my own teaching in order to reflect upon how I could have best dealt with the situation.

I will use the weekly mentoring meeting to discuss any specific behavioural concerns I have and see if there is a way to use a behaviour recovery plan with students as necessary, gaining the benefit of my mentor’s experience and also her support. I will also use the meeting to recap on the other aims described above, in order to ensure that I am addressing the needs of all learners, providing a safe and effective learning environment.

It is clear that classroom and behaviour management is a challenge that involves much more than keeping pupils quiet and getting them to complete set tasks. Effective classroom and behaviour management enables the teacher to create a positive, co-operative learning environment, in which individual needs are met. It enables pupils to feel involved in their learning, take responsibility for their actions, and develop social skills which will take them beyond their school career.

1. To avoid the use of his/her and he/she throughout the text, teachers in the singular will be referred to as feminine and pupils as masculine. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. As neither of the approaches considered in this assignment discuss the physical layout of the classroom in detail, this essay will focus on behaviour in the classroom. In addition, as a trainee teacher, it is not something that I can influence as I will be a ‘guest’ in the classrooms in which I teach. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. School X’s name for PHSCE [↑](#footnote-ref-2)